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The Good News Spreads to Samaria

8: 5-8

34 AD

The events of Acts 3-8 transpire with mounting concern on the part of the Jews, and especially the Jewish authorities in Yerushalayim. The rising tension resulted in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Rabbi Sha'ul to disrupt and destroy that new Messianic movement, involving persecution and even death of the believers. The persecution led various believers such as Philip to go to Samaria and bear witness of Yeshua.

The good news spreads to Samaria DIG: Why was it important for the Hellenistic Jews to be driven out of Jerusalem? How did God use Philip? Why do you suppose He worked this way in this case? Who were the Samaritans, and why were they despised so much by the Jews?

REFLECT: In what ways is the gospel like sowing seed? How was the gospel sown in your life before you became a believer? How much do you desire to see unbelievers from other cultures come to the Lord? Do you intentionally reach out to share your testimony? Or are you content to stay within your "holy huddle?"

The scattering of the Hellenistic Jews led to the most significant step forward in the mission of the congregations of **God**. One might say that it required persecution to make them fulfill the implicit command of **1:8**. As the Hellenistic Jews moved into new areas, they found a ready response to the gospel, and this was exemplified by the way in which **the Samaritan** people responded to it.¹⁶⁹

Philip was not one of **the apostles**, but a Greek-speaking Jew because **the apostles** remained in Jerusalem. **He** was one of the seven chosen to serve the needs of the Hellenistic Jewish widows (**6:5**). Like Stephen, **his** faithfulness to that task led **ADONAI** to use **him** in a wider ministry. Later in the book of **Acts**, **Phillip** is called **the evangelist (21:8)**.

As a result of the persecution of the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem, **Philip went down** from the high plateau of Tziyon **to a city [in] Samaria (8:5a)**. This was not the **Samaria** of the TaNaKh. In 30 BC, after the Assyrians had destroyed the ancient capital of the northern Kingdom, the Roman Emperor Augustus awarded it to Herod the Great who renamed it Sebaste (the feminine form of the Greek word Sebastos or Augustus). This was merely **a city in Samaria**. In New Covenant times the term **Samaria** was no longer applicable to a city, but to a region, like Galilee or Judea.

Who were **the Samaritans**? Six hundred years before this, **the Assyrians** conquered this area of northern Isra'el and **they** deported them from the area. **The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the wealthy and middle-class Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah in Gozan on the Harbor River and in the towns of the Medes (Second Kings 17:5-6)**. There **they** lived in a pagan population with its vast empire. **The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns (Second Kings 17:24)**. Those pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of the remaining Jews in northern Isra'el, and from those **people** came **the Samaritans**. Because the Israelites intermarried with **the Assyrians**, **the Samaritans worshiped ADONAI, but they also served other gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought (Second Kings 17:33)**. The Jews hated **the Samaritans** and considered them compromising half-breeds who corrupted the true worship of **YHVH**.

Philip, who **proclaimed the Messiah to the Samaritans (8:5b)** even though **the Samaritans** only accepted the five books of Moshe as **their** Holy Scriptures (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah, to see link click [As - Opposition to Rebuilding the Temple](#)**), **Philip's** mission to them initially fulfilled **ADONAI's** express command in **1:8**. Because **the Samaritans** did not accept the prophets of the Jewish TaNaKh, **they** believed the next prophet to come on the scene would be **the Messiah**. So it was no surprise that **with one accord, the crowds** continued to **pay close attention to what Philip was saying** since the expectation of a coming future deliverer known as the *ta'be*, or *restorer*, who would restore "true worship" on Mount Gerizim, was a major part of **Samaritan** theology (**Deuteronomy 18:15ff**). Given that foundation of belief, **Philip** could simply proclaim **Yeshua** as the long-awaited **Messiah**.



Despite the hostile relations between the Jews and the **Samaritans** at the time, **Philip** found a receptive audience in **Samaria**. **The Ruach ha-Kodesh** prepared **their** hearts to respond to **Philip's** message **as they both heard and saw the signs that he was doing (8:6)**. Because **the apostles** had **laid hands on him (6:6)**, **Philip** had the same ability as **they** did to perform signs and miracles that acted as a confirmation of **his** message. The only people performing signs and miracles in **Acts** are **the apostles**, or those designated by **the apostles**. Nowhere in **Acts** was this ability given to believers in general. And in this context this was especially essential because of the activity of Satan (see [Ba - Simon the Sorcerer](#)). Simon deceived people with his ability to perform counterfeit miracles. So it was necessary for **Philip** to perform miracles: **For unclean spirits, or demons, were coming out of many who were plagued, shrieking with a loud voice. Many paralyzed and crippled were healed also**, to counteract Simon's "miracles." The Adversary mustered all his forces in a futile effort to oppose **God**; however, **He** was still healing the **demon**-possessed through those designated to do so by **the apostles**. **So there was great joy in that city (8:7-8)**.

There are still many **demon**-possessed people today. But despite the claims of current faith healers, believers do not have any authority or ability to command or directly drive out **demons**. The temporary sign gift of miracles was the power (Greek: *dunamis*) to drive out **demons**. Like other sign gifts, that gift no longer exists. As **the apostles** passed away, so did the need for sign gifts. As with physical healing, however, we can pray for **God** to intercede, who always hears and who has all power.

Nowhere in Scripture are believers told to "bind Satan" or exercise authority over demons. In fact, if someone thinks they are binding Satan, they are doing a pretty lousy job, because he is still very active in my neighborhood. The devil will not be bound until a holy angel does so at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom (see the commentary on [Revelation Fb - He Seized the Dragon, or Satan, and Bound](#)

Him for a Thousand Years). And those who attempt to assert their authority over **demons** risk winding up like the Jewish exorcists, the sons of Sceva, of **Acts 19:13-16**. It is dangerous to claim for ourselves authority that **ADONAI** has not granted to us. The biblical instruction for conducting spiritual warfare is laid out in **Ephesians 6:10-18**.

The powerful miracles and preaching of **Philip** resulted, as it had in Yerushalayim, in the salvation of many **Samaritans**. But as true biblical preaching inevitably does, it produced two vastly different responses. Many accepted the gospel and believed, **so that there was great joy in that city**. They were the true believers, the wheat. **Their** joy didn't come from demons, but from complete deliverance from sin through **the Lord Yeshua Messiah**. Others, however, were false believers, the weeds (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Ev](#) - The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**).¹⁷⁰ Having introduced the protagonist in the story, **Luke** now turns to the antagonist - a certain man named **Simon**.